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Sub-Saharan Africa

This paper seeks to examine and evaluate the prospects for sub-Saharan Africa. It focuses on four inextricably linked topics, the context of the region, that is, those factors in the background of the region that must be kept in mind when dealing with it, the significance of the region to the United States, US interests in the region and the current US policy toward it. The paper culminates in recommendations for future US policy toward sub-Saharan Africa.

This paper will assert that future prospects for sub-Saharan Africa, vis-a-vis the region today, range from decidedly bleak to guardedly optimistic across a wide range of significant issues. Relative to the rest of the world, however, the region is almost certain to fall even farther behind. *Africa's relative decline, combined with a dearth of vital or significant national interests, argues strongly against a major change in the US policy which places sub-Saharan Africa at the bottom of our worldwide regional priorities.*

Context

The historical context of sub-Saharan Africa is dominated by two broad events, the exploitation of the colonial era and subsequent political legacies, and the highly divisive effects of the Cold War.

The colonial legacy left the region poorly positioned for success. The colonial economies were largely exploitive of resources and commodities. While the Europeans left significant infrastructure behind, with few exceptions that infrastructure was targeted at resources and commodities, and thus there was little sustainable industrial base, skilled workforce, or potential for middle class business development left when the colonial powers pulled out. Complicating the poor economic prospects was the highly arbitrary political division of Africa with little regard for ethnic, tribal, or religious considerations. The leadership of the new nations thus also had significant internecine problems to deal with. Both these legacies left strong anti-western feelings in their wakes.

The second historical factor to consider was the strife encouraged during the Cold War. As will be discussed later, US Cold War policy dominated relations with Africa from the 50's until the 90's. Without assigning blame to any of the varied participants, nor attempting to assess the value of the proxy wars' relative to the rest of the world, it is safe to say that several nations, particularly Somalia, Ethiopia, Namibia, Mozambique, and especially Angola were left destitute, thus encouraging the perception among Africans that the US was another exploiter like the European colonial powers.

The cultural and social context of sub-Saharan Africa is dominated by tribalism and nationalism as reactions to colonialism, the impact of Africanized Islam along the eastern littoral and in the Sahel, the subregion between the Sahara to the south, and finally, the stepchild of the first two factors: slavery.

Economic conditions in sub-Saharan Africa are complex and defy either an optimistic or pessimistic assessment. On the positive side, in the three plus decades since independence the region has seen some real economic growth. Using UN figures for per capita income as measured by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) and per capita GNP growth, two thirds of the region has experienced significant growth from 1960 to 1992. Three caveats need to be appended. First, the growth was by no means evenly distributed, few nations performed at or near the industrialized world average of about 350% growth in PPP, the majority performed at something less than 100% growth, and a quarter of the region experienced essentially no growth or even deterioration. The second caveat is that the worldwide depression of the 80's hit the region hard, all but a handful of countries experienced negative GNP growth in the eighties. The final and most pessimistic caveat is that despite the economic growth, relative to the region in 1960, the region fell even farther behind the rest of the world.

Combined with the economic upturn in Asia and elsewhere in the world, the anemic growth in sub-Saharan Africa does not bode well for its future as either a self-sufficient region nor as a market partner. Rates of return on investment, even in politically stable countries, lag the rest of the world. US trade with the region is generally not robust (notwithstanding Nigerian oil and South African minerals) nor likely to become so. Simply put, even with political stability, Africa is not yet a lucrative place to either invest nor trade.

Political stability of a sort currently exists in the region. The repercussions from the end of colonial rule seem to be settling out in Mozambique and Angola, and majority rule in South Africa has taken hold in a remarkable fashion. The states of the region seem to be focusing on tackling their significant internal problems and the worldwide demise of Marxism has led most states to follow the path of capitalism or socialist capitalism with (mostly) civilian governments.

On the negative side of the political context, the simmering problem of tribalism, though no longer inflamed by the Cold War belligerents, remains. The potential intertribal carnage displayed in Rwanda lays under the surface of many countries in the region. Also on the negative side, at least from an American perspective, is the fact that few of the states in the region have multi-party democracies.

The region has entered an era of unprecedented military inactivity. With a few exceptions, such as the Sudan, Liberia, and Rwanda, military activity has dropped markedly. Of more importance to the US, the remaining conflicts are rebellions, i.e. interstate conflicts and thus generally contained within the national borders. Also of military significance, the region's only weapons of mass destruction in South Africa were dismantled and the nuclear materials placed under IAEA oversight.

Significance

None of the nations in sub-Saharan Africa represents a direct threat to the United States. Having said that, it should be noted that numerous indirect threats exist. These include low level terrorism, possibly linked to Islam but by no means limited to it, ethnic conflict, potential mass migration to Europe and the US driven by overpopulation and chronically lagging agricultural production, environmental degradation as exemplified by unique wildlife loss, expansion of both the Sahara and Kalahari deserts and pollution in urban and industrial areas, international crime, particularly as a transshipment route for illegal drugs, but also including banned wildlife exportation, and rampant disease that is more difficult to control in transnationally mobile populations.

The challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa, and to some extent the US, are numerous and largely intractable. Fortunately, the first prerequisite to address the problems, political stability, is largely in place. Maintaining that stability in the face of difficult economic conditions, particularly with burgeoning populations and declining resources, is problematic.

US Interests

Defining US interests in sub-Saharan Africa is particularly difficult, given that none fall into the classic 'vital' or 'strategic' categories. Rather, US interests fall into two lower priority categories, those interests that have or may have limited impact on the US, and those that the US feels morally compelled to act on despite little or no impact on the US. These issues may be further subdivided into Political, Economic, Military, Values, and Environmental categories. US interests in the region are summarized in the following table:

	Limited Impact on US	Compelling US Interest
Political	Prevent Spread of Militant Islam Avoid Antagonizing large UN/GA Bloc Prevent terrorism aimed at US	Promote Democracy Prevent Interstate Conflict
Economic	Market Potential (>600 million people) Oil, Precious Metals, Gems Commercial Investments International Crime	Promote Free Markets

Military	Prevent Hostile Control of Bad el Manded	Maintain Alliances Prevent Interstate Armed Conflict Compelling U.S. Interest
	Limited Impact on U.S.	
Values	Domestic Guilt Over Slavery U.S.-African Familial Connections	Prevent Starvation Promote Human Rights
Environmental	Disease	Preserve Endangered Wildlife Preserve Unique Environments

Of these issues, the most significant are (in rough priority order) prevention of interstate armed conflict prevention of terrorism aimed at the US and US interests, ensuring access to oil and minerals, ameliorating or preventing the spread of diseases, preventing starvation (and analogously, promotion of agriculture), combating international crime, tapping the market potential of the region, and preventing gross human rights abuses

The prognosis for these issues, absent active US efforts, is mixed. With the removal of Cold War stimuli, few interstate boundary disputes appear ripe to explode into armed conflict. This situation is certainly not stable in the long term given agricultural and economic shortfalls and population and tribal pressures.

Anti-US terrorism is at a very low level in sub-Saharan Africa, probably lower than any other continent. It is unlikely to rise unless Islamic fundamentalism sweeps the region in a particularly virulent form. Although this scenario is evident in the Maghreb *north* of the Sahara, it is much less likely in the Moslem areas of the Sahel to the south and the east coast. This is due to the unique nature of sub-Saharan Islam (Radu p 312). US policy makers should not be too sanguine however, as the failure of Islamic fundamentalism growth in the region does not prevent anti-American feelings in this same community.

Access to mineral resources seems a particularly bright spot given the peaceful transitions in South Africa and Namibia. Access to Nigerian and Angolan Oil on the other hand is certainly not assured given the instability of both governments.

Preventing the spread of diseases in the region is highly problematic given generally poor sanitation, poor nutrition, and limited medical capabilities. Malaria, Cholera, Yellow Fever, River Blindness, Bilharzia, and sleeping sickness are endemic (Griffiths p 20). More exotic diseases led by HIV infection, have spread significantly, and pose a proportionately greater risk to middle class and elite Africans.

Preventing mass starvation is generally a function of improving agricultural production, improving distribution, and limiting population growth. Prospects for improving agricultural production are limited at best. Lack of arable land, poor soils, and poor rainfall distribution have resulted in much of the green revolution missing Africa. Griffiths argues persuasively that non-Africans need to be more sensitive to proper agricultural

methods when applying 'modern' agricultural technology. Distribution problems have defied solution except when the international community is galvanized after mass starvation has already occurred. High population growth rates are reinforced in African families as a way to overcome poor health and high infant mortality.

International crime and particularly the use of Africa as a trans-shipment region for the drug trade is on the rise. At this point Africans have not been prominent in either the production nor coordination of shipments of illegal drugs.

Tapping the potential African consumer market of over 600 million people has been limited by the relatively poor economic performance of the African economies, with subsequently little capital for consumption. As described above the relatively poor economic growth and return on investment in African nations will tend to limit the relatively minuscule US-African trade for the foreseeable future.

Human rights abuses in Africa are probably on the decline along with the general shift from military, autocratic regimes to civilian regimes with some measure of popular support. Unfortunately, tribal conflict within even popular civilian-led states can lead to gross human rights abuses, as played out in Rwanda. Western response to those widespread abuses is typically too late to prevent massive damage.

Policy Evaluation

US policy is evolving from the Cold War Containment to Enlargement and Engagement with a new focus on encouraging democracy, free markets, and recognition of transitional issues such as crime and ecological security.

Against the panoply of problems facing sub-Saharan Africa the US has severely limited resources to carry out this policy. Despite superpower status, the US's superpower tools are not generally amenable to the region's problems. Military force, political clout, and industrial economic influence are the wrong tools and the monetary wherewithal is insufficient, even if all the problems could be solved with enough funding, which they cannot.

The US should focus on those high interest areas where it can make an impact. In particular it should emphasize an 'ink blot' approach to economic aid. This concept is an adaptation of a French counter-insurgency strategy, and calls for reinforcing successful enterprises wherever they occur with an intended effect of the success spreading to surrounding areas like a spreading ink blot. Rather than targeting aid on failed economies and to solve immediate problems, our economic aid should focus on those economies on the cusp of success with long term potential to positively influence their neighbors. We should seek multinational approaches wherever possible and

maximize the use of corporate America and non governmental organizations. We should encourage regional cooperation and flexibility in the application of IMF and World Bank rules.

Despite all that we can do for the region, even if it were our highest priority, many of the regions problems are insoluble. We should be prepared to be flexible on the central themes of our policy, namely promotion of democracy and free markets. While both are core American values and should be championed as such, sub-Saharan Africa may be unable to meet their own challenges with either our brand of democracy or free markets. We should not let our view of democracy be the only model of government that we deal with, since pluralism may not work in tribally divided nations. Similarly, given the poor economic performance of the region in general, a higher degree of protectionism is probably necessary than in large volume trading nations.

None of these recommendations is a radical departure from current policy. Given the intractable nature of many of sub-Saharan Africa's problems, its relative decline vis-a-vis the rest of the world, the paucity of available US resources, and lack of vital US interests in the region, increased US priority on the region is not warranted.

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